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Will Greater Production Cure Social and Industrial Unrest?

By HUGH FRAYNE

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WHEN discussing the subject of production and its relation to the high cost of living and the generally unsettled condition of the country, practically every one who writes or speaks on the subject invariably places the blame upon labor. This is done in general terms as they do not attempt to explain why labor is responsible but all use the same convenient argument that labor is demanding too high a wage and producing less than it should. This charge has been made so often in glittering generalities that the public has come to accept it as a fact, thereby placing labor in the false position of being responsible for the chaotic condition in which the country is at the present time.

IS DECREASED PRODUCTION THE FAULT OF LABOR?

Is this true? I want to say most emphatically that it is not. I base my opinion upon facts not upon theory or because of a partisan desire to defend labor. Those who give the subject careful study will be able to determine for themselves that the abnormal conditions confronting us are not because labor has failed to give the maximum of production or because the wages it receives are too high or because, as erroneously stated, labor has deliberately curtailed production. This lamentable condition is due largely to the greed of the profiteer who is responsible for most of the unrest and discontent not only of the worker but of the nation as a whole.

That many great changes in industrial conditions have taken place from those which existed in pre-war times cannot be denied. In some industries where the piecework system was in vogue and where the workers were permitted and often compelled to work sixty or more hours per week, there was quite naturally a very high production. Through the activities of the trade unions of these workers in many instances the piecework system has been abolished and supplanted by a week-work system on a forty-eight or forty-four hour basis. While it is reasonably true that the production on a sixty or more hours per week piecework basis was greater than the production on a forty-eight or forty-four week-work basis, there is a big question of doubt whether the production now under the shorter work week is a fair standard for the worker. Production under the longer piecework system was the opposite, taking into consideration the physical welfare of the worker which had always been unnoticed. In other words, production is not too low now but was often too high before, considering the human element and a decent living standard as a basis of measurement first, and dollars and profits afterwards.

Manufacturers and employers generally, who have had to conform to this change, complain bitterly that it has caused a dead financial loss to them. This is not true. The difference of sixteen hours taken from the working time of the piece worker on the sixty

hour basis would only mean a slight reduction in the abnormal production of the commodity as there would be no material used, no wages to be paid or general overhead expense incurred, therefore the sixteen hours' time could not, as stated by manufacturers, be a total financial loss. In seasonal industries, especially, the working time can always be extended to meet all necessary production demands.

A further argument is advanced by manufacturers and others that with the shorter work day has come the higher wages to the workers, thus placing an additional burden upon them. In answer to this, I point to the fact that never in the history of America have profits to the manufacturers and those having commodities to sell been as great as they have been since the signing of the armistice up to the present time. Therefore, whatever concessions have been made to the workers in granting the shorter work day or higher wages are more than overbalanced by the excessive profits which they are receiving, making due allowance for every overhead charge in the operation of their plants, even to the extent of meeting the high cost of living affecting every phase of their business and social life.

It has been substantially proven to the satisfaction of the public generally and especially to the working people of the country, that the reason given for the high cost of living is not due to the lack of a maximum production by labor and that a higher production would bring a lower living cost to the public. It is well known to those who have studied the subject that many living commodities, for which a prohibitive price is asked from the consumer, are not scarce because of lack of production but that the warehouses of the country have been and are overstocked with these necessary

articles and are being hoarded in storage, preventing their natural direct flow to the consumer who could be plentifully supplied at a reasonably low price, taking into consideration and making full allowance for every natural normal overhead charge of production created as a result of abnormal conditions caused by the war.

The American Federation of Labor is a firm believer and a staunch supporter of the principle that labor should at all times give full and unstinted service to the end that the highest maximum production in all lines be maintained, but labor insists that it shall have a say in making and setting that standard. When production is increased to the detriment of the worker, his physical health or general welfare, the lines must be sharply drawn.

LABOR'S IMPORTANCE IN NATIONAL STABILITY

By what plan or system can the country be brought back from a war to a peace basis without seriously affecting the whole social fabric? Are we to return to the old system of industrial war caused by the employers of the country continuing to deny labor the right to organize or that labor will not be permitted to have any say in the making of the conditions under which it will be employed? Is the standard of living of the American working man and his family to be placed at a point where he or they must deny themselves many of the common necessities in order to live at all? The old idea of a living will have to be revised so that every comfort of life, consistent with the station of the worker, shall be enjoyed by him and his dependents. Life's comforts must be graded upwards in future. Exploitation of all kinds must cease if we are to have a better

world and a better life. Labor believes that it is entitled to this as it did most to save the world for democracy.

The American working man, with few exceptions, has always shown his intense loyalty and devotion to this government and its institutions. If that were not true they would have long ago arisen in their might and driven out the profiteers and all those who are, in their mad desire for profits, surely destroying the economic and social life of the nation, making us a nation of discontented people when we should be the greatest, happiest and most contented nation in all the world.

The American worker realizes that he was the greatest factor in the world war and his eyes have been opened by this realization. Understanding that he was the greatest factor in the winning of the war which saved human liberty for the world, he feels it not unreasonable to demand his fair share of that liberty and considers that it includes a higher standard of living than in the old days was possible not only for himself but for his family. That does not mean revolution; it means evolution—evolution upward. Inevitably it means a better nation for each one of us. It may or may not mean fewer of the very rich; surely it means fewer of the very poor and this means a higher national average.

During the war the great power of labor and its importance in the affairs of the world was demonstrated as never before. It has been clearly shown that there is no phase of the industrial life of our country that labor, in some form or other, does not enter. With this fact before us, let us not make the serious mistake of trying to reconstruct a great nation upon a foundation from which plan the rights of labor have been over-

looked and expect the structure to endure. The greatest asset of a nation is labor; it should be protected in its rights. High standards for labor bring a higher development and the future should not be measured by the standards of the past. Labor should be accorded full recognition and receive justice and equity in all its claims.

Wrong impressions as to labor's importance should be corrected for, unless the labor problem is considered as part of the whole subject of national stability, industrial wars will continue to go on in the future as they have in the past and will be more harmful to the country's welfare. Unless this is done a social unrest will be created which will have a more far-reaching effect upon the affairs of the country than even the war itself, because it would be more permanent. The workers have learned that they are the basic foundation upon which the success of the nation must depend and they feel that they are entitled to a larger share of the results of their labor than ever before. Social and economic justice must be given to them as a matter of right, not as a concession.

The world needs balancing because of the high tension under which we have lived during the war and up to the present time. America must furnish her share and perhaps the largest influence in that direction because it is absolutely necessary for the sake of all the peoples of the world that we should strive to overcome this condition. Financial interests and employers generally must be made to understand that their first duty and obligation is to protect the nation, and employers who believe that their responsibility ends with the employment of a worker must be brought to realize that beyond their financial

interests and simply giving the worker employment, they must concede every right that others have and which they claim for themselves. The right of workers to organize, to collective bargaining and the right to have a say in making the terms and conditions under which they shall work, through a representative of their own selection, must be conceded by the employers and should never be a matter of controversy. An employer's obligation does not end there as he should take a greater personal interest in seeing that the workers in his employ are properly treated, trained and fitted to perform the work to which they are assigned, so that by training and developing and the right of collective coöperation with their fellow workers, they will be able to give service of a high standard and receive in return due and full recognition for that service. The first essential of the successful operation of an industry is the proper recognition by the employer of the human and other rights of the employe. Such sympathetic coöperation will reflect itself in production and other advantageous ways to the general betterment of all.

HOW SHALL SOCIAL UNREST AMONG WORKERS BE PREVENTED

That there is a keen social unrest spreading among the workers throughout the country no one can deny and to treat it with passive indifference is a very serious mistake as that is not the remedy. To prevent this growing unrest that is leading many to the doctrines of bolshevism is the responsibility of every one of us who believes that sane methods rather than insane should be applied. Many methods have been suggested by those who are unfriendly and do not understand labor, some of which are most drastic. You cannot destroy bolshevism by

putting it in jail, deporting it or even killing the individual as that would only aggravate and intensify the condition. Recognition of the human and other rights of the workers will do more to allay social and industrial unrest and have a greater harmonizing influence which would make for better coöperation, than any force or coercion that employers may use.

The creation of industrial courts, court injunctions, bonus and profit sharing schemes and the so-called industrial democracy shop idea, which are nothing more than old methods under new names, all of which have failed, will not be accepted by the worker because none of them solves his problems. He believes that his trade union has done more to establish industrial freedom for him than any other agency could. The right to work or not to work is an inalienable right which he is not going to surrender. Whether employers want to or not they must realize that the old pre-war conditions will not be acceptable again to labor, neither shall labor accept wage reductions for it contends that wages are not too high now but were too low before, and they are going to maintain the new and higher standards, come what will; but if the cost of living is reduced to the level where abnormal prices and profiteering are stopped, labor will then not have to make so many demands for wage increases to keep up a decent living standard after the cost of commodities are stabilized. If labor must continue to bear the burden of the high cost of living without the protection of those government agencies charged with that duty, it must in self-defense continue to demand more for its services in order to maintain the new and higher standards of living which it believes it deserves.

When we speak of social and indus-

trial unrest it is not enough that we simply mention one of the several fundamental units entering into the whole problem. It is not possible to cure a nation's economic and social ills unless we take into consideration all of the elements that enter into the question. Labor's rights are human rights and are prior to all others and if labor, through its service to society and by its industrial activities, succeeds in establishing a higher standard of life for itself, the natural sequence will be that the social life of not only the workers will be greatly developed and improved but the same will reflect itself throughout our whole national life as well. As time goes on the inevitable is bound to happen; the working people through the force of organized effort will have established a higher living standard socially and industrially. This is the natural law and trend of evolution which rules the destiny of all.

It is too much to expect that organized labor of America should assume all the responsibility of placing the country back to normal conditions. Labor now, as always, is willing to assume its full share and will make any sacrifice necessary to that end. However, it is not a group question; it is a national one and should be dealt with as such. If labor, as during the war, is expected to surrender the human ideals which it has struggled and suffered in the past to establish and which have done so much to bring a little happiness and comfort into the lives and homes of those who have had none before, what is expected of those who have taken advantage of a nation's helplessness while recovering from a great war? Are they to be permitted to break every law of decency and right, as well as the laws of the country and continue their exploitations, giving no consideration

to the rights of the people or the country's welfare, paying no attention as to how much they are entitled to in the way of profits but acting on the principle of getting all they possibly can? The unsatisfied greed of the profiteering element is responsible for the dislocation of the whole social and industrial fabric which has prevented the reconstruction and the proper readjustment and stability of the nation.

In the United States the profiteer has made the lot of the majority of the population almost unbearable and it is reasonable to believe that pure Americanism, which glories in the fact that it had its origin in revolt against injustice, in due course will revolt against this most flagrant of all injustices if it is permitted to continue. There should be a law passed to punish those who are charged with this responsibility. Commodity values should at once be reduced; that would increase money values. For every 25 per cent that prices are reduced the value and purchasing power of money will be increased proportionately, thereby helping to stabilize and standardize conditions. Restore the American dollar to its standard value of one hundred cents, then every person in this country who has a dollar will be able to buy two dollars worth of present values.

Industrial problems cannot be solved by evading them or by attempting to substitute unsound theories or practices which up to the present time have failed as a remedy. This is a human problem and must be the basis upon which any plan for the reconstruction of economic justice to the workers should be founded. Unjust laws or unsound principles are not constructive nor do they tend to improve the condition or the welfare of the workers; instead of being helpful

they simply retard and destroy general development. This is a serious economic loss which cannot be prevented or replaced unless the full rights of the workers are guaranteed.

Much has been said about the great loss to the country through strikes and industrial disturbances which it is claimed have curtailed production to the extent that it was responsible to a degree for the living costs going so high. Industrial casualties in the United States every year equal this country's total loss of wounded and killed during the war. In the state of New York in the year 1918 there were two hundred and eighty thousand industrial accidents reported. The cost of compensation was fifteen million, five hundred thousand dollars. The total cost of accidents to industry was sixty million dollars. Many of these accidents were preventable. During all their fighting, the marines did not lose as many men killed, missing in action and dead from wounds as the industrial army of the state of Pennsylvania lost during the year 1918. If to the marines wounded in action there are added the number of men in the army branch of the service who were wounded in action, the total will fall below the number of wounds sustained by Pennsylvania's industrial army during the last twelve months. Strikes and industrial disturbances are only a temporary stoppage of production while industrial accidents, most of which are preventable, either permanently remove the workers from industry or maim them in such manner as seriously affects their efficiency, causing them great hardship because of economic reasons and affecting their productivity in industry which is more responsible for a curtailed production than strikes and labor controversies can possibly be.

SHALL LABOR BE RULED BY FORCE?

I am not in accord with those who declare that the only method of dealing with labor is by a policy of force and who expect through this method to have labor subscribe to their doctrine as a means of establishing industrial peace. Their contention for the establishment of the so-called open shop and secret methods of discrimination and black-listing of workers does not lead toward the harmony and coöperation that should always exist between employer and employee. To expect that any group of workers can give the best that is in them, even though they may honestly strive to do so under such circumstances, is expecting that which is impossible. To rule labor by force on the one hand and a submission by labor through fear on the other create two conflicting and opposing forces which cannot be reconciled and when those who use such methods in dealing with the labor problem change to the modern idea and recognize the fact that there can be no peace or harmony under such conditions, then will we have reached the stage when the human method of dealing with labor shall replace that of the brutalizing and coercive one.

THE PRICE OF EXTRAVAGANCE

At this time when the question of the high cost of living and the profiteer is in the minds of every one—labor more than any one else—the argument has been brought forward by many that the workers, especially, have become extravagant in their living and if they would produce more and consume less this change would go far toward relieving the situation. We have, it is true, the problem of the high cost of living and there is also the cost of high living which is a right of

the wage earner to have more and better things on which to live. In pre-war times many families were forced to get along without many of the commonest necessities which affected them physically and otherwise, and reflected itself in their inability to work and produce the maximum required because of a reduced vitality. Reports from the New York Board of Health and the Board of Education show that with all of the boasted extravagance and high living of the workers, thousands of school children are suffering from malnutrition because the parents do not obtain a sufficient wage to provide nourishing food for them. This is a most serious indictment against the industrial conditions of our country and refutes the statements of those who speak without knowledge of facts, as the future men and women of industry and other walks of life must be drawn largely from these underfed and undernourished children of the overworked and underpaid men and women who do not receive for their services a sufficient amount to maintain themselves and families at a standard anything near that which the American working man and his family should enjoy. If there is going to be a physically and mentally strong and healthy generation to follow, that hope lies in the safeguarding of the children of the present who will be the men and women of the future, upon whom America will have to depend for its national life.

Anyone who will give thought and study to the question of the cost of high living and will approach the subject with a view of obtaining truthful information, will have no trouble in determining that what was a few years ago a luxury is now a common necessity. The young man or woman in industry, having secured a position

where they are decently paid for the services they render, are now for the first time privileged to buy better clothing and sometimes jewelry and other adornments, more clean and wholesome food and enjoy many social comforts in the form of amusements of various kinds, all of which had been denied them in pre-war times because of economic conditions. Shall we say that they are not entitled to these things, they who work, produce and give service for the compensation they receive, high though it may seem to some? If they are forced to pay exorbitant prices for these comforts that is not their fault, it is the fault of the profiteer who charged them far more than the commodity was worth. To stop buying, which would mean to stop consuming, as suggested, and deprive them of these comforts, would also stop the wheels of industry, throwing many thousands of men and women out of employment; so instead of being a remedy to help solve the high cost of living by curtailing the consumption of commodities, it would intensify and aggravate the situation and make conditions even worse than they are at the present time.

I admit that there is a new high standard of living created by working people which has been criticized as the cost of too high living but when that high living cost, made high not by the workers but by those over whom they have no control, is carefully surveyed we find in homes where formerly there were no comforts in the way of furnishings, decent living surroundings or the opportunity for educating the children, that there are now many of these comforts and privileges not previously enjoyed. Shall we say that this natural, normal and evolutionary development to a better standard of life is to be held

responsible for the chaotic condition from which we have been struggling to free ourselves during the past few years, or shall we place the blame where it rightfully belongs, upon those who, under the guise of patriotism and boasted Americanism and in their mad desire to obtain wealth and power, would sacrifice every ideal and tradition of the nation and all that a people could give to make it great, without any consideration except one of selfishness and personal interests?

America's problems are unlike those of any other country because of the cosmopolitan make-up of its population. Its citizenship largely depends upon the foreign races of other countries who come here bringing with them all of their racial traditions and characteristics. They come to us expecting to find and enjoy that great liberty which their own countries have denied them. This foreign mass must be made into real American citizens, which is a very slow process, made more so because they do not understand our language and customs. Education and opportunity, with humane treatment, are the most

helpful agencies to accomplish this purpose.

There is one feature of this whole problem that should stand out more prominently than any other and that is recognition by all of us of the human elements that are so necessary in life. It has taken a great world war to make us fully understand that human life is the most precious thing and must be regarded as such. If we ever hope to occupy the position before the world that the United States must take, we must lead the rest of the world in all things, the greatest of which is the recognition and safeguarding of human rights in its truest sense. The humanizing influence of a great nation such as ours must adopt these basic fundamentals and lead the way for the rest of the world to follow, by stabilization under governmental protection and regulation, so that there shall be less danger of future industrial upheavals. If these fundamentals are recognized by employers as a right of the workers, it will go a long way toward creating a greater production and curing social and industrial unrest.

We saved the world for democracy, now let us save democracy for the world.